

226 month. The decline in opportunity is due, not to the weather, but to
461 the scarcity of fish, which are said to move from these coastal waters during the winter season.

226 The fishermen follow the lunar calendar. The type of fish caught
221 is determined by the season. There is some specialization based on age and experience. Only the skilled and relatively young can successfully make a living diving for the lobster and disengaging him from the rocks below. The most intense activity is during the summer months, and the cash earnings of the fishermen are greatest at this time.
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226 Fishermen pay attention to the weather and to the moon. Part of
821 their weather knowledge comes from traditional lore, part from observation, part from the modern storm warning systems. Fishermen do not go out if there are storm clouds overhead, especially if they are moving fast. The worst sign is an increase in the height of the waves, even if the weather is good. The phases of the moon are also considered. The half moon is the best, the quarter moon is good, but neither a full moon nor a moonless night is considered favorable. The exception is fishing for white cuttle fish, caught on winter moonlit nights. At present, official storm warning signals are universally observed. The red flag flying from a pole on the main street near the breakwater is enough to keep every fisherman at home. This faith in meteorology has not always existed. Even in recent years, fishermen have disregarded the warnings because of disbelief, or ignored them when storms did not appear following a previous warning.

226 Fishing in the Minatogawa area is coastal (if we include distances up to twelve miles out) and is on a small scale. Much of the gear is improvised by the fishermen themselves. The methods are simple and effective, and the boats are small. This is not one of the most important fishing areas in Ryukyuan waters.¹

226 Men become fishermen by imitating their skilled elders. Knowledge
868 of the fish and of the waters is imparted by word of mouth. The old men are the sources of the detailed knowledge of the currents and of the main fishing grounds, and this knowledge, held in the memory, is also transmitted orally. There are no maps or charts. Usually it takes a
[813] beginner about two years to become acquainted with the fishing areas, and about three years to have a working knowledge of the currents.

1 For a general discussion, see Aquatic resources of the Ryukyu Area. (U.S. Dept. of the Interior. Fish and Wildlife Service. Fishing Leaflet 333), Washington, 1949. This work has an interesting collection of maps and drawings of various types of nets. It is not concerned with particular areas in Okinawa, nor with customs connected with fishing.

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A fishing village has a different kind of regularity than an agricultural village. Activities in both are determined by the weather. During a heavy rain, everyone is in his house. But the farmer, even with a dark angry sky, can work up to the storm, and often continues working in a mild rain. The fishing village is guided both by bad and anticipated bad weather. On a fine fishing day, the village seems deserted with the men gone, and the women in the homes. But several days of rain or unfavorable weather keep the men home, and the village is alive with other activities, such as repairing nets, boats, and houses. Much of the fisherman's work at sea is at night, either in the actual fishing or in going and coming. For this reason, there is considerable daytime sleeping among them. On off days, the young fishermen loiter around, often finding it difficult to pass the time away.

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Conclusion

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Fishing has become the occupation of a few places, such as Itoman town, some villages on the Motobu peninsula, and Minatogawa. Ryukyans have achieved considerable fame for their skill in fishing in waters other than their own, such as their drive-in net fishing in the East Indies and around Singapore.³ Possibly it is the fewness of good ports, the necessity of adapting requirements to varying local geographical conditions, such as the coral reefs, or the long period of emigration that have prevented the large scale development of fishing on this island and insured the dominance of an agricultural life.

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It is also a striking fact that, on this small island where no village is far from the sea, fish is an uncommon article of the diet. The explanation is simple. It is a problem of distribution in which two considerations are involved: the higher prices obtainable in Naha, and the difficulties of preserving fish while distributing them through the rural villages. More often than not, the fish in a farmer's diet is the dried sardine or a canned fish from Japan, not the local catch.

Part 2

The Quarries of Minatogawa-Nagamo

1

Introduction

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Minatogawa is famous throughout Okinawa for its stone. Stone from the village and its environs may be seen in many towns and villages of the island. Before the war, there was a flourishing boat trade in wood and stone between Minatogawa and the northern region. The fine

³ For a recent statement, see Aquatic resources of the Ryukyu area, as cited, 7-9.

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like "owners" of the concrete objects which they inhabit. These objects can be made subservient to human needs if care is taken not to offend the deities. As long as proper ritual observances are performed, humans need not fear their hostility. They are addressed in prayers and chants, and people make offerings to them at several ceremonies during the year. No one in Taira, including the priestess, has any exact knowledge about their characteristics, and there is no theological dogma, but people know that when building a house, for example, one must announce his intention to the deities and pacify these spirits who have been carried with the lumber from the mountains or with gravel from the beach and the sea. They must be thanked for letting the builder use such materials and sent back to their natural abode. Before the house is finished, the surrounding plot of land must be cleared of all evil spirits. Neglect of such ceremonies can turn supernatural beings into adversaries. One family who neglected proper rituals on their house lot when they built their home tried to appease angry deities by holding a ceremony a year after the house was finished because bad luck had befallen members of the household. Although most supernatural beings can be pacified by proper observance of rituals, there are some who are inherently malevolent. These ogres may be seen in the form of fire balls or in some other shape or physical appearance. [776] 782 [776] 782 342 [777] [821]●

The worship of these nature deities and the observance of ceremonies in their behalf are in the hands of the high priestess and her female assistants. In former times each main house, later each village, had its own priestess. The present high priestess in Taira derives her office from a much later institution, a nation-wide hierarchy of religious officials established by the Okinawan king in an effort to combine religion with political influence and supervision in the villages. Today the high priestess has no association with the central government; the Japanese abolished the system. The hierarchy of female religious officials (see Lebra: 1958), those representing main houses, and the chief village priestess is no longer clearly delineated in Taira, since representatives of several offices have left the island or died, and the vacancies have not been filled. The high priestess has taken over most of the religious functions. Her chief assistants are older women from the two main houses. While these three women officiate, several other women are in attendance as helpers. In spite of the diminishing role of animistic religion in the daily life of younger people, the high priestess still enjoys prestige in the community. She is exempted from communal labor in recognition of her status. [793] 562 794 [777] [613] [554] [653]

The present high priestess is a woman in her fifties who works and 793